(a) whether it is a fact that the Indian Defence scientists are aiming to fly an indigenously built hypersonic plane very soon;

(b) if so, whether it is a fact that the hypersonic plane is three-times faster than the existing fighter aircraft;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) by when the ground tests of the above aircraft are going to take place?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) The defence scientists have evolved the preliminary design of a hyperplane, based on which certain technology packages are being developed with participation of academic institutions, as lead in programme. However no project has been sanctioned for developing hyperplane.

(b) to (d) Does not arise.

Training of IAF Pilots on Hawk AJT

60. SHRIMATI N.P. DURGA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the first batch of 25 IAF pilots has gone to UK for training on the Hawk Advanced Jet Trainers; and

(b) if so, by when the second and third batch of pilots will go to the UK to get training from the Royal Air Force?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) and (b) 75 IAF pilots will be trained in UK on Hawk aircraft over the next three and a half years. The induction rate is six to eight pilots every three months. The induction of first batch has not yet started. The second and third course is scheduled to commence on September 20,2004 and January 3,2005 respectively.

Defence Modernisation Fund

61. SHRI RAMA MUNI REDDY SIRIGIREDDY: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have formulated Defence Modernisation Fund to tackle the chronic under-utilisation of the Defence Budget year after year;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the fund is going to become operational from the current financial year; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE):(a) and (b) The then Finance Minister, in his speech while presenting the interim Budget 2004-2005, had announced the setting up of a Non-lapsable Defence Modernisation Fund for acquisition of weapons systems.

(c) and (d) This matter relates to the Budget which is to be presented tomorrow.

Trial of 155 MM 52 Calibre Towed Howitzer System

62. SHRI RAMA MUNI REDDY SIRIGIREDDY: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that in the first week of January, 2004 the Indian Army has carried out new round of tests on 155 mm 52 Calibre Towed Howitzer System;

(b) if so, the results thereof;

(c) whether it is a fact that in the earlier tests the above systems have not met the general staff qualitative requirements; and

(d) if so, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) No, Sir.

(b) In view of answer to Part (a) above, does not arise.

(c) User trials were carried out earlier, but none of the systems met all the General Staff Qualitative Requirements.

(d) The systems which were trial evaluated earlier require further technological upgrades.